The Welfare State

THE PERSON AND THE FAMILY

By

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THE INDUSTRIAL CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP
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Note.

This is the substance of an address given at a meeting of the Council of the I.C.F., held in London on Thursday, June 30th, 1949, with the Bishop of Chester in the Chair, published at the request of the members present.

A similar pamphlet has also been issued, namely: "The Welfare State, CHURCH AND COMMUNITY," by The Very Rev. Dr. P. A. Micklem. (Price 4d.)

The Person and the Family

By Maurice B. Reckitt.

The Church cannot fail to be deeply concerned with the issues raised by the development of the Welfare State, for two reasons.

(1) Had the Church maintained her moral and intellectual leadership, the social and economic evolution of the last two centuries would not have confronted us with many of the problems which the Welfare State has been brought into being to tackle. A Christian society would have been pre-eminently that **"Responsible Society"** which was desiderated at the meeting of the World Council of Churches at Amsterdam last autumn. Welfare would have been integral to it ; it would not have had to be provided **for** it—as it has to-day.

(2) At the same time, the Welfare State is in one aspect the product both of a "social conscience" and of practical manifestations of social energy and compassion, for which a main inspiration has been and is derived from the Christian faith.

So our task, in the face of the problems it raises, must first be one of **"Discrimination,"** seeking to disentangle its ethical and social values from the dangers which it creates to the moral and spiritual independence of the person and the family ; and, secondly, of **Realism,** not postulating some situation we should (perhaps rightly) prefer in place of that in which history has in fact placed us. The Christian sociologist must be ready, in this as in other respects, to bear the burden of the social sin of the situation with which he has to grapple.

Mixed with the disinterested altruism and consecrated sacrifice out of which the Welfare State has developed are less exalted but quite legitimate motives ; the demand of the

poor for security and a larger share in all that eases the material strain of life ; the realization by the prosperous that bad social conditions may react against themselves. In this latter connection we may recall that a century ago Kingsley's struggle for "sanitary reform" mingled demands for justice with appeals to prudence—*e.g.*, in the matter of the cholera epidemic. Similarly a low standard of health may affect the power of a community to defend itself, as the discovery that Britain was a "C3 nation" in the first World War suggested. By contrast Germany adopted Protection in the middle of the 19th century to raise the physical level of the peasantry needed for its conscript armies. Again, compulsory education here was necessitated and largely inspired by the need for increasing the efficiency of the industrial and clerical worker.

Along with such revelations came the increasing realisation that the promotion of social welfare was in itself a technique requiring professional training. "Social Service" became a job, with an almost limitless opportunity for expansion. "Professional social workers belong to one of the finest professions in the world, which owing to the foresight of Sir William Beveridge might be one of the largest," said Mrs. Montagu Norman in 1944. It is now assumed by many people as a **normal and permanent fact** that the majority of families will continue to need expert assistance in the management of their homes, their children and their communal relationships.

There is now a very noticeable increase in the realization that **the Family is a social asset.** This is a good thing in so far as it implies the recognition of a fundamental reality ; it is a move away from an "atomized" view of society towards a more truly organic conception. Yet it is potentially dangerous, since it is a short step from the view that the health of a nation depends upon the strength of its families to that which sees the health of the family existing for the strength of the State. But this should lead us first to ask **why** the family should need so much underpinning to-day.

The automatic influences of our industrialized, conurbanized and ultra-mobile society tend to disintegrate the family ; the housing pattern forbids it **space ;** the loss of spiritual conviction, weakening fidelity, forbearance and perseverance, undermines its **security.**

No doubt there are compensations. The Barretts are no longer in Wimpole Street, the Forsytes no longer encircle Hyde Park in introverted avarice or claustrophobic frustration. A daughter or a wife can walk out of their homes into the arms of a lover without encountering the obstacles which faced either Elizabeth in the middle of the last century or Irene at the end of it. The home is no more "the children's prison" ; and, if it is still too often "the woman's workhouse," she can now commonly exchange it for the factory canteen and the Women's Institute.

Yet, confronted by the discouraging features of juvenile delinquency, vastly increasing divorce, constant tales of cruelty to children, and many other abuses which seem to be extending rather than diminishing, we see that the family is not now functioning spontaneously well.

In a healthy society the family would appear as **primarily** a self-reliant unit, contributing to social vitality on its own initiative. It is in proportion to the degree in which society is deformed from its natural shape, whether as a consequence of false ideas or of the pressures resulting from ill-proportioned social and economic institutions, that the family has to be supported by abnormal means.

In the 19th century this meant "social service."

In the 20th century it increasingly implies "**the** social services."

Similarity of diction ought not to disguise the truth that this is a highly significant transition (despite the fact that "paternalism" was often involved in, for instance, C. O. S. activities). What were long regarded as primarily personal matters—in regard to which benevolent individuals organised themselves to give personal help to those in need—are now increasingly regarded as public concerns. Yet it is surely significant that, when we think of Health, Motherhood, Child Guidance and Education, we find those in a position to make their own arrangements about them **preferring to do so.**

Equally, however, when we consider the vast majority of our people, we are impressed by the stake which the community has in seeing that these matters are efficiently provided for them.

Hence the "social conscience"—fortified partly by prudential considerations among the well-to-do and a demand for help by the indigent—has evolved the social services, no

longer as exceptional aids for the distressed but as a normal expression of communal living. This is what we mean by THE WELFARE STATE.

Yet the matter is not quite so simple as might appear. For two forces have been at work to produce the WELFARE STATE.

(1) The development of a "communal consciousness," which results in the conviction that certain aspects of the lives of the nation's citizens are best organized on a collective basis.

This conviction may be wise or mistaken in any given case. The point to be noticed is that the social regulations to which it leads have been consciously willed, at any rate by some preponderant influence in the community.

But it is too easily assumed that all "social services" come into existence as a consequence of this process.

On the contrary—

(2) Much social legislation for the "welfare" of the masses has been initiated far less from any "democratic" choice, whether by them or their would-be benefactors, than as an outcome of the unchecked operation of the disintegrating tendencies which have revealed themselves as inherent in our economic and industrial development, as a consequence of which State action has to be mobilised to prevent the victims of this falling into irreclaimable destitution, disease and misery.

This truth has been obscured by the fact that it is an unwelcome conclusion for all concerned.

(*a*) The supporters of hitherto prevailing economic principles, and those who have profited from them, have been naturally unwilling to acknowledge their anti-social effects.

(*b*) Reformers have been and are anxious to credit all apparently benevolent legislation to a conscious increase of the "community spirit."

(*c*) Those who—at any rate materially—have benefited have liked to think they have done so as a consequence of an entirely valid development of social progress.

But the upshot of what has been largely a fatalistic drift is likely to be deleterious.

(1) It encourages us to confuse improvised social patchwork with authentic social construction.

(2) It increases the tendency, so widespread among the masses to-day, to regard the State as something external to the citizen, and its ordinances as embodying what "they" do to—or possibly for—"us." This makes nonsense of democracy, and turns public officials into one more "governing class," the more resented perhaps for being the most completely de-personalised.

(3) It may impair the vitality and self-reliance of the average family by circumscribing too closely its initiative and sphere of action.

No doubt in all this we ought not to be too much swayed by our pre-conceptions. We need more evidence from those qualified to give it about what **is** the actual impact of contemporary social ordinances upon the family of to-day.

What is clearly of primary importance, however, is the conscious intention or sub-conscious assumption behind "social service," whether statutory or voluntary. Undoubtedly such services—and perhaps most of all those on a voluntary basis—**can** be made to aid and sustain the family—**if that is what they are intended and designed to do.**

Examples here are the **Creche** and the **Nursery School.**

If the main purpose of them is to facilitate the mother leaving home for a full day's work in the service of the "Export Drive"—then can anyone maintain that their influence will fortify the domestic life of the nation?

But if, on the contrary, their purpose is to relieve the overdriven mother of intolerable strains imposed by the unnatural conditions of urban poverty to-day, then they may be the only means of enabling her to maintain the family at all.

A further instance is afforded by that characteristic crystallization of collective bliss—the Community Centre. The artificial fabrication of "community" is, of course, a sign that we are at issue with the consequences of an unnatural society, the shape and "ethos" of which inhibit it from throwing up or sustaining associative groupings spontaneously. A healthy society would no more busy itself with **talk** about community than a healthy man with talk of his digestion. Again, the man who talks about his teeth is usually the man with bad teeth—or false teeth!

We have to be realistic about this, however,

The first necessity is to appreciate that our society is **not** spontaneously "progressive" in any valid sense—that we are **not** every day and in every way getting better and better, sociologically speaking. But it is equally important, having realized this, to accept the fact that we have to nurse ourselves back into a state in which we can **first** recognize social health for what it is, and **then** teach ourselves how to enjoy it by a new obedience to its laws. This involves the acceptance of such abnormal means as our weakness imposes.

If the activities of the Welfare State are regarded primarily in this light, they are most likely to prove of genuine—and in some cases perhaps of permanent—value.

Here—for example—the **Community Centre** comes in. In the next period of our history it is capable of proving, if wisely directed, a most valuable adjunct to—and even support of—family life.

(1) It is particularly needed to-day because of the pressure on domestic space—which cannot be substantially relieved by pre-fabricated congestion. Under the restricted conditions imposed by much of our urban and suburban housing, people will simply have to have a "home from home" if they are to tolerate their own home life at all. In any case there is nothing objectionable about a "home from home" so long as a man realizes that he is away from his real home when he is there.

(2) **If** our visions of Full Employment are not to prove delusive (as for more than one reason they may—and perhaps should), then sooner or later our productive mechanism will over-run not merely "effective" but real demand. Our industrialized masses will then have time on their hands **and** some money in their pockets.

In this situation there will arise what has already been foreshadowed as the "Problem of Leisure."

(3) The Community Centre may well provide the only place in which the majority of our people will be able to escape the dehumanising influences of large-scale commercialized entertainment, with its mass hypnotism, gregarious hysteria and vicarious thrills. Speedway, "Dogs," Ice Hockey, Cup Ties, however harmless in themselves, do tend to stimulate these phenomena.

It should be the primary aim of the Community Centre to provide opportunities, not only for individuals but for whole families to interest and amuse themselves and each other—as distinct from merely **being** amused—or even instructed.

No doubt there is always a danger in developments which involve more and more of the people's collective income being spent **for** it rather than **by** it. But danger is not to be avoided in the situation to which our past mistakes have brought us.

A Community Centre can do nothing but good **so long as it is not mistaken for something it can never be ; and so long as it is seen as a supplement to and not a substitute for the one essential "Community Centre"** which only **the home** can be.

As with "community," so with "**social security.**" It can be welcomed if it is regarded not as an end but as **a means to something beyond itself.**

Economic anxiety is a paralysing and demoralizing influence ; only the saint can survive it without enfeeblement, and even he is wont to organize in communities to avoid its distractions.

"Social security" (which has no necessary relation to "nationalization") ought to be accepted as the basis on which a creative social order can be reared, but it MUST NOT be mistaken for a substitute for it.

"A community cannot survive economically and socially if to survive is the limit of its ambition." This was said recently by Dr. V. A. Demant, who so often says wise things. Our country is now in some danger of losing its place in the world from failure to perceive and embrace a positive vocation. "After austerity—what?" The politicians are giving no clear answer to this question.

Finally, a problem which the Welfare State poses is in what mood the Christian free to do so should assist in its operations.

No doubt it is true that the manning of the statutory services can be in its own way as completely a vocation and an opportunity as was (and still in a measure is) that of the voluntary services. But the Christian will always have **his**

own special outlook to preserve and to manifest in the application of social techniques. This has been summed up in a dictum of Chesterton's: "We have to find a way of loving the world without trusting it." Such an attitude should save us from a sentimental Utopianism on the one hand and a harsh paternalism on the other. God so loved the world that He sent His only beloved Son—because the world could not be trusted to save itself. It is by service in such a spirit, without illusions, but without patronage and without despair, that we may become "workers together with God" in the social order.

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